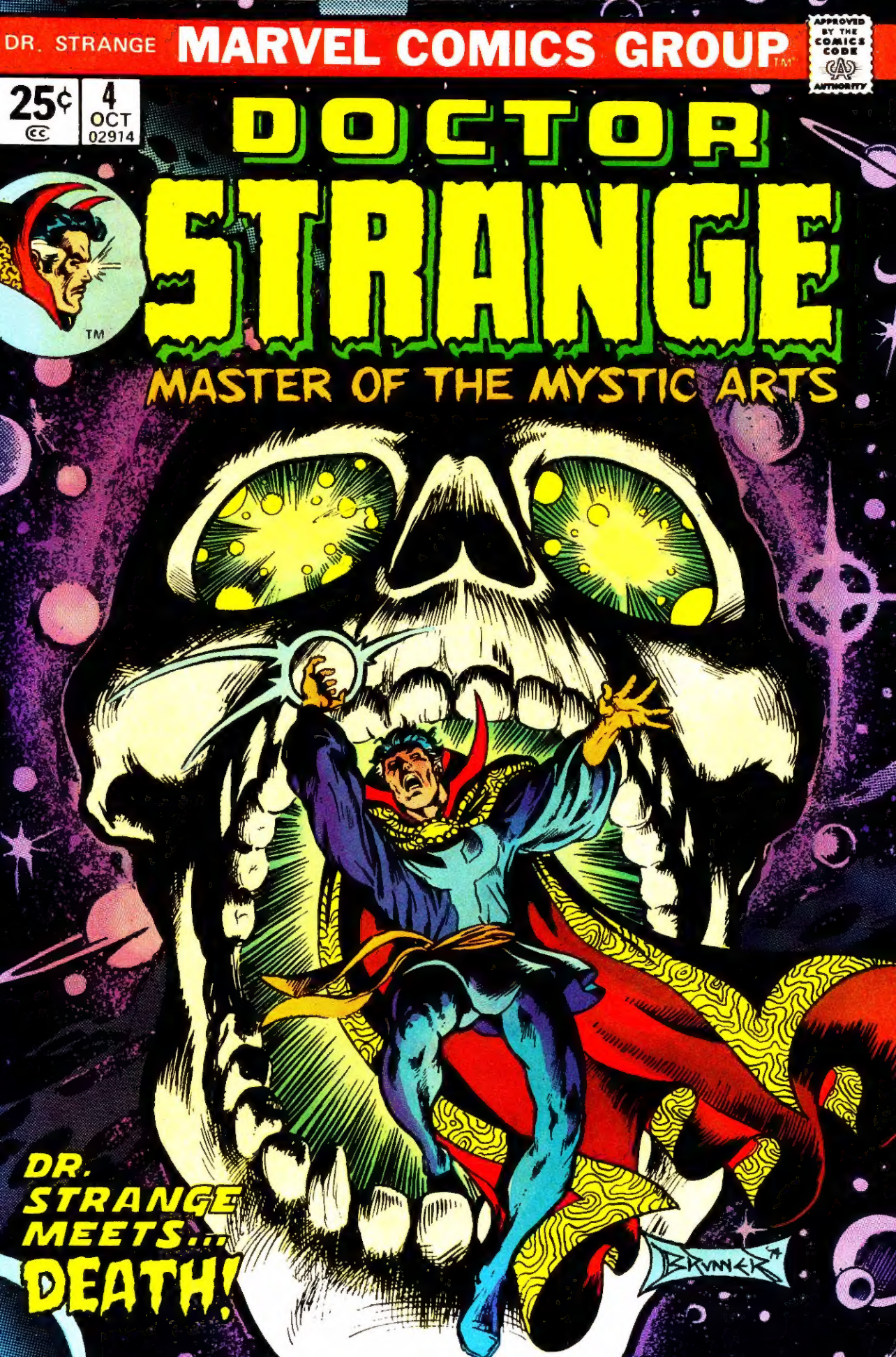
DR. STRANGE
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DOCTOR
STRANGE
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS
DR. STRANGE MEETS... DEATH!
BRUNNER

Once he was a man like most *others* — a *wordly* man, seduced and jaded by *material* things. But then he discovered the *separate* reality, where *sorcery* and *men's souls* shaped the forces that shape our *lives*. In that instant, he was *born again*, to become a man like *no* other—a man who left us *behind*, as he strove to stand against the unseen subtle perils hovering *thick* and *black* around our fragile existence...and so began the mystic majesty of.....*DR. STRANGE!*

Stan Lee PRESENTS: Dr. STRANGE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™

STEVE ENGLEHART Author • FRANK BRUNNER Artist | DICK GIORDANO Inks | TOM ORZ Lettering | L. LESSMANN Color | ROY THOMAS Editor

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"IT BEGAN AS ***SILVER DAGGER*** SURREPTITIOUSLY ENTERED MY SANCTUM SANCTORUM AND CAPTURED MY BELOVED ***CLEA.***

"UPON SUBJUGATING HER ***WILL*** AND SUBDUING MY MANSERVANT, ***WONG,*** HE TURNED TOWARD HIS ***NEXT*** GOALS...

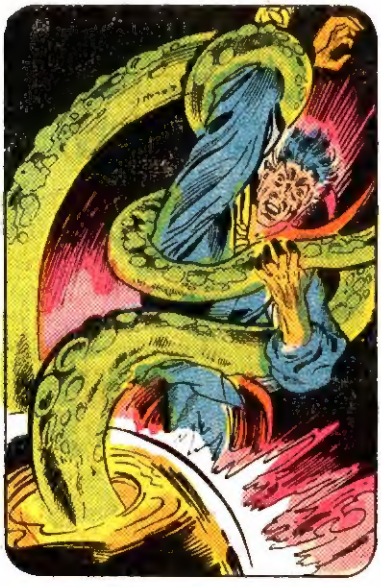
"...MY OCCULT ***AMULET,*** THE ***EYE OF AGAMOTTO,*** WHICH I HAD INNOCENTLY LAID ASIDE...

"... AND ***ME!***

"HIS SILVER BLADE PIERCED ME NEAR TO DEATH AS I SLEPT, BUT EVEN AS I TOPPLED, MY STUNNED MIND PLOTTED ***SURVIVAL!***

"I USED THE ***NECROMANCY*** OF THE ***ORB*** OF AGAMOTTO, ***COMPANION*** TO THE AMULET, TO ***STILL*** MY WOUND...

"...BUT *SUDDENLY*, GROTESQUE *TENTACLES* SHOT FORTH FROM THE ORB, *ENTANGLING* ME, DRAWING ME... *INSIDE!*



"INSIDE WAS A WORLD OF *UNREALITY*, WHERE A PRATTLING *CATERPILLAR* TOLD ME I HAD VENTURED *TOO NEAR ILLUSION* IN MY ESCAPE FROM DEATH, *DOOMING* ME TO THIS SHADOWY REALM!

"HERE THE *ABSURD* IS *FACT*, THE *UNTHINKABLE COMMONPLACE!* CARTOONS HAVE *DIMENSION*, AND *SOULS* SERVE AS *FOOD! NOTHING*, BUT *NOTHING*, IS REAL...

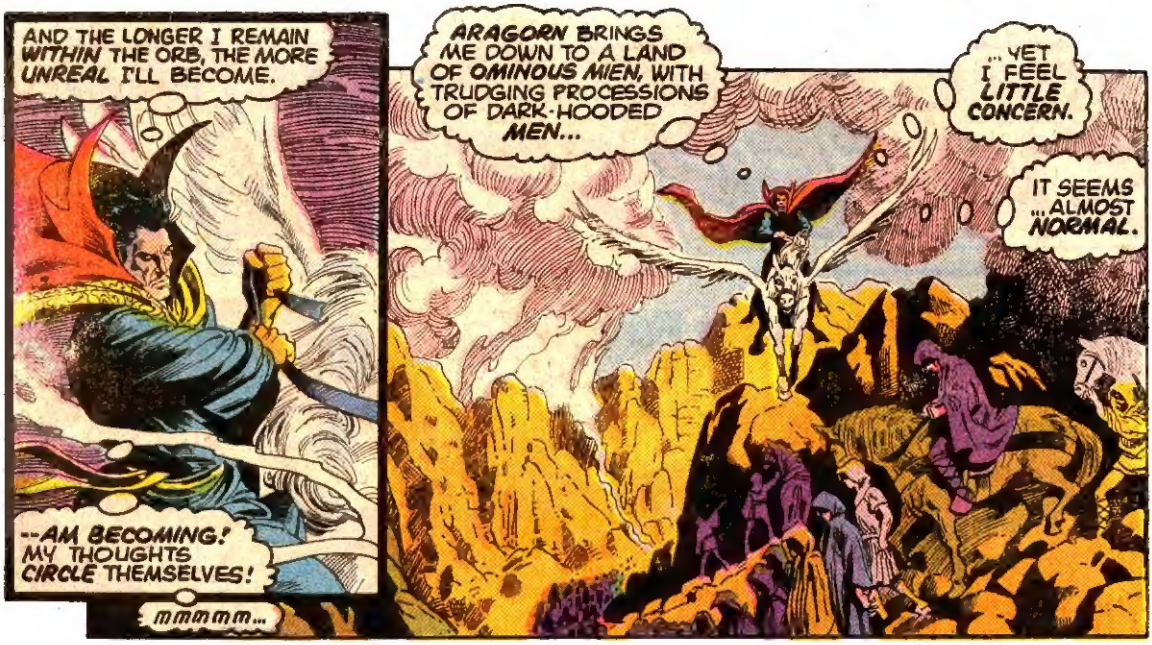
"...NOT EVEN THE *OTHER INHABITANTS*, WHO APPEARED TO BE PEOPLE I *KNEW!* WORSE, THE LONGER *I* REMAIN, THE MORE *LIKE* THEM I'LL BECOME!

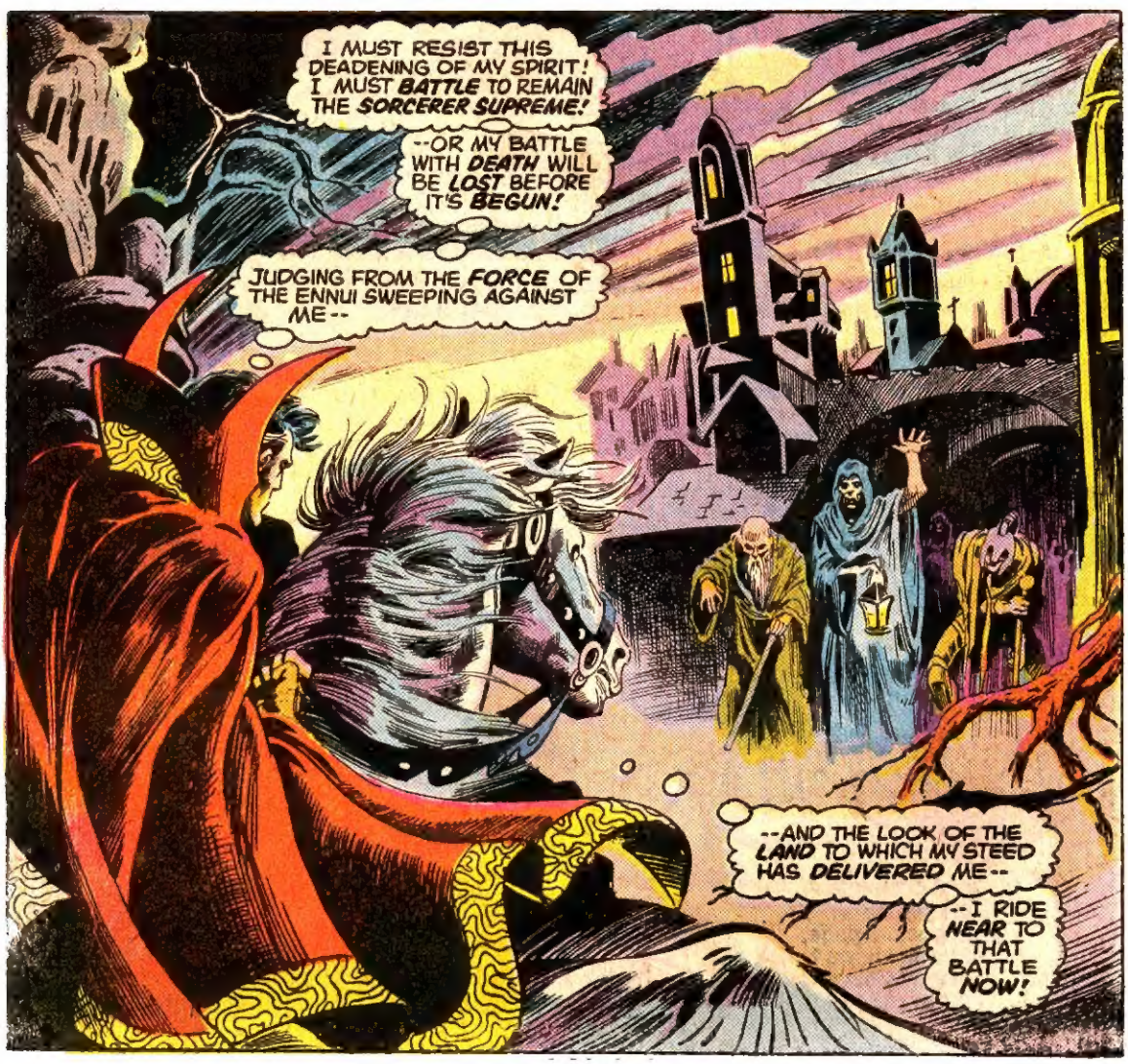
"BUT THERE IS *ONE WAY OUT*-- AT THE *CENTER* OF THE ORB. I HAD TO *FIGHT* MY WAY PAST ALL WHO *OPPOSED* MY PILGRIMAGE THERE...

"... BUT WITH THE AID OF THE *WHITE QUEEN* AND HER HORSE, *ARAGORN*, I HAVE *FOUND* THE PATH TO SALVATION -- IF I CAN *CALL* IT THAT...

"...FOR WHEN I *ARRIVE* AT THE ORB'S INNER EXIT...

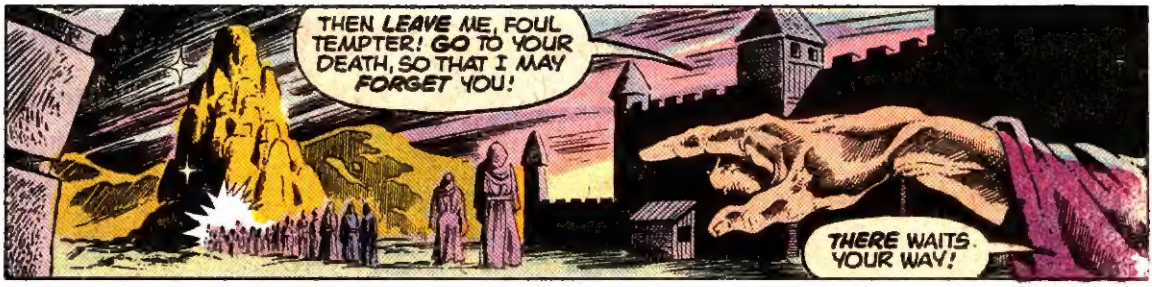
"...I MUST *ONCE AGAIN* CONFRONT *DEATH!*"


AND THE LONGER I REMAIN WITHIN THE ORB, THE MORE UNREAL I'LL BECOME.
--AM BECOMING! MY THOUGHTS CIRCLE THEMSELVES!
mmmmm...
ARAGORN BRINGS ME DOWN TO A LAND OF OMINOUS MIEN, WITH TRUDGING PROCESSIONS OF DARK-HOODED MEN...
...YET I FEEL LITTLE CONCERN.
IT SEEMS ...ALMOST NORMAL.


I MUST RESIST THIS DEADENING OF MY SPIRIT! I MUST BATTLE TO REMAIN THE SORCERER SUPREME!
--OR MY BATTLE WITH DEATH WILL BE LOST BEFORE IT'S BEGUN!
JUDGING FROM THE FORCE OF THE ENNUI SWEEPING AGAINST ME--
--AND THE LOOK OF THE LAND TO WHICH MY STEED HAS DELIVERED ME--
--I RIDE NEAR TO THAT BATTLE NOW!

THESE THREE WHO GREET ME -- THEY, TOO, SEEM ALMOST FAMILIAR!
DR. STRANGE... DR. STRANGE...
YOU KNOW ME, OLD ONE?
I HAVE HEARD TALES OF YOUR COMING... ON A HORSE, IT WAS SAID...
I RODE A HORSE ONCE... AS DID MY TWO BROTHERS.
WE RODE WITH THE ONE YOU SEEK, DR. STRANGE! AYE, WE RODE WITH DEATH, DR. STRANGE!
MY NAME IS FAMINE!
BY THE HOARY HOSTS OF HOGGOTH! YOUR SKIN--!
I KNEW YOUR MENTOR, THE ANCIENT ONE! I VISITED HIM IN HIS FINAL DAYS, YOU KNOW...!
DO NOT THINK TO PASS US BY, DR. STRANGE! OUR HANDIWORK IS EVERYWHERE!
YOU HAVE ENTERED THE DOMAIN OF THE DYING--

"--WHERE THE DENIZENS SUFFER THEIR DEATH THROES--FOREVER--
"--AND NEVER PASS BEYOND!"
IT'S HORRIBLE! THE AGONY OF THESE DAMNED SOULS...!
AAAA
THE THROAT-SPLITTING SCREAM FROM ABOVE YANKS HIM BACK TO UNREALITY--
CRUMP!
HE WASN'T AFTER ME! HE WANTED TO KILL HIMSELF!
I STILL EXIST! MY BONES LIE SHATTERED IN MY PLAGUE-RIDDEN BODY--
--BUT I CAN-NOT DIE!
STRANGER, IF YOU HAVE ANY MERCY-- END MY TORMENT! KILL ME! PLEASE!
I-- I--


THEN LEAVE ME, FOUL TEMPTER! GO TO YOUR DEATH, SO THAT I MAY FORGET YOU!
THERE WAITS YOUR WAY!

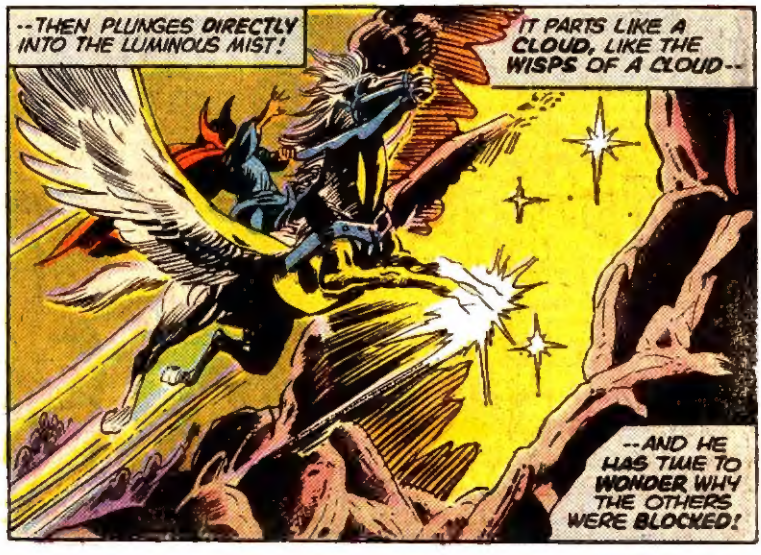
GO ON! RIDE FROM ME WITH YOUR HEAD HELD HIGH--SINCE YOU FEEL NO PAIN, UNLIKE US WHO CANNOT RIDE ON!
HE IS WRONG--!

THE PAIN DOES BEGIN AGAIN, AS I NEAR THAT EERILY SHIMMERING...
...BECKONING?...
... HAZE! IT HAD VANISHED WHEN I ENTERED THE ORB!

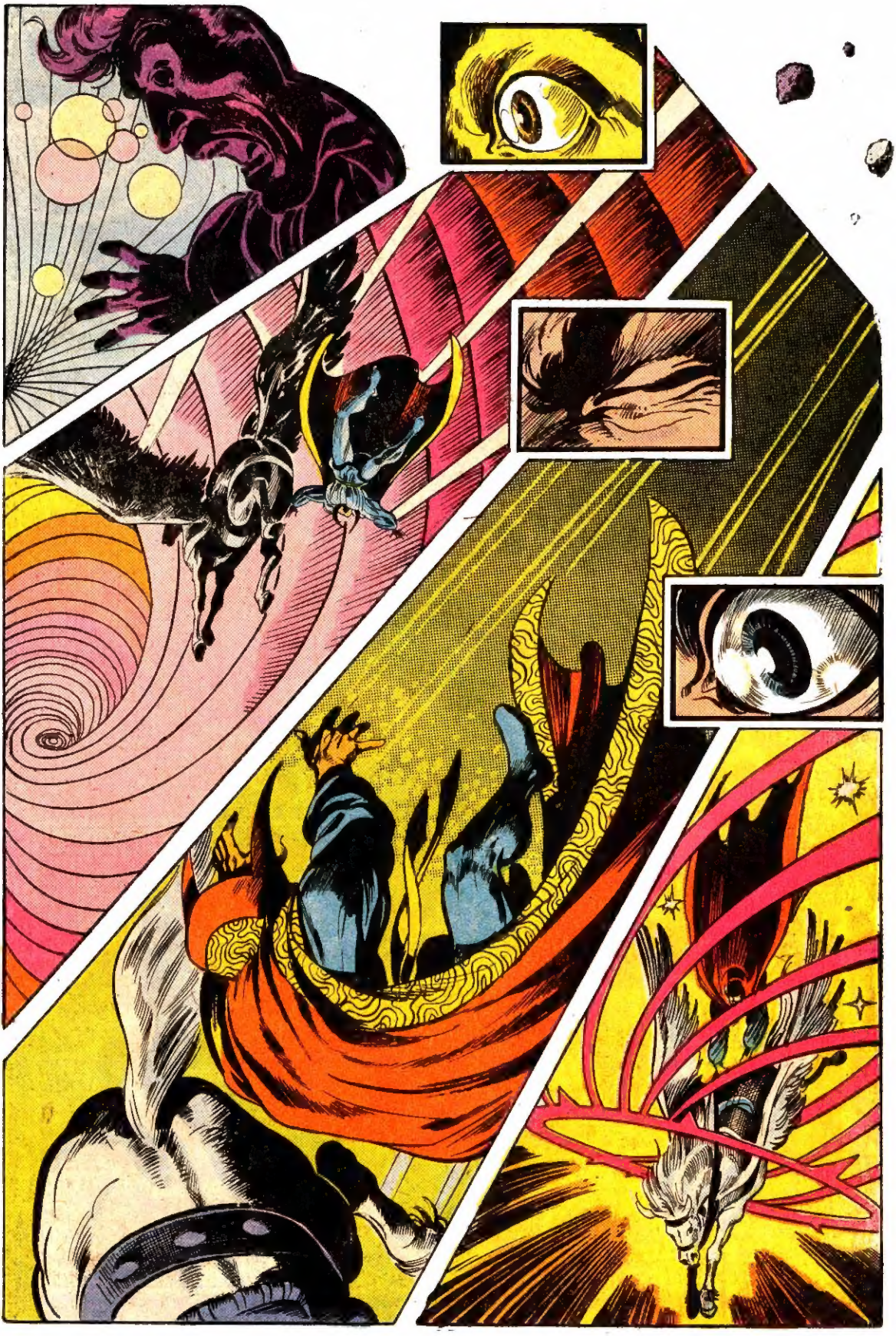
DR. STRANGE--AT LAST! WE'VE BEEN GATHERING HERE AT THE CENTER SINCE YOU ENTERED THE ORB, MAGICIAN!
WE ALL KNEW YOU WOULDN'T ACCEPT YOUR LOT PLACIDLY, AND WHEN YOU PASS BEYOND--
--WHEN YOU DIE--
--PERHAPS SOME OF US CAN SLIP IN UNSEEN!

THE STENCH OF DECAY IS THE AIR HERE, AND THE PSYCHIC VIBRATIONS ARE THE SHEEREST DESPAIR HE HAS EVER SENSED--AND THE RAGGED APPARITIONS IN THE ROAD BEFORE HIM SCHEME TO DIE!
WHILE HIS SOLE GOAL IS LIFE!
COME ON, THEN!

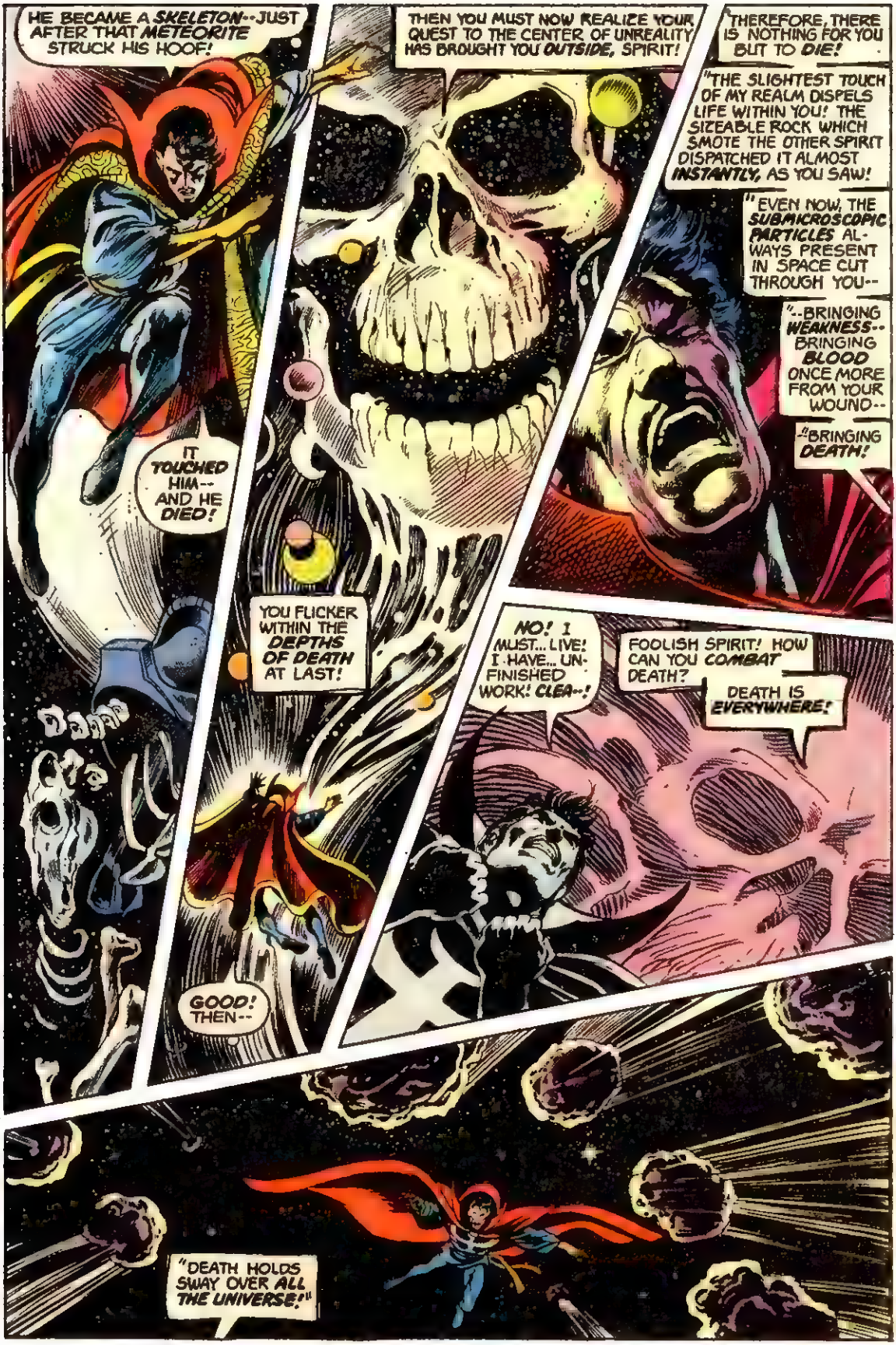
HE LEAPS THEM, CLEARING THE GROUND IN ONE GREAT, SURGING ARC--


--THEN PLUNGES DIRECTLY INTO THE LUMINOUS MIST!
IT PARTS LIKE A CLOUD, LIKE THE WISPS OF A CLOUD--
--AND HE HAS TIME TO WONDER WHY THE OTHERS WERE BLOCKED!

HE WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT HE LEAVES BEHIND.
LET ME IN! LET ME IN!
OH, GODS! IT'S SOLID AGAIN!
WHY IS HE THE ONLY ONE TO MEET DEATH? WHY NOT US?
WHY MUST WE GO ON?
ON THE OTHER SIDE, DR. STRANGE SITS HIS STALLION ALERTLY, GIVING HIS EYES THE TIME TO ADJUST TO THE DARK...
...HIS EARS TO THE SILENCE.
--AND BEHOLDS WHERE HIS JOURNEYS HAVE BROUGHT HIM!
SUDDENLY--
I'M FALLING!
GRADUALLY, HIS PUPILS PICK OUT HIGHLIGHTS-- THEN LOOMING SHAPES-- THEN HALF-RECOGNIZABLE MASSES.
HE FINDS HIMSELF IN A CAVE...
--ONLY TO FEEL THE PASSAGE SWIFTLY NARROW AROUND HIM. HE DISMOUNTS--
... AND IT'S NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER CAVE.
CAUTIOUSLY, HE PROBS ARAGORN FORWARD--



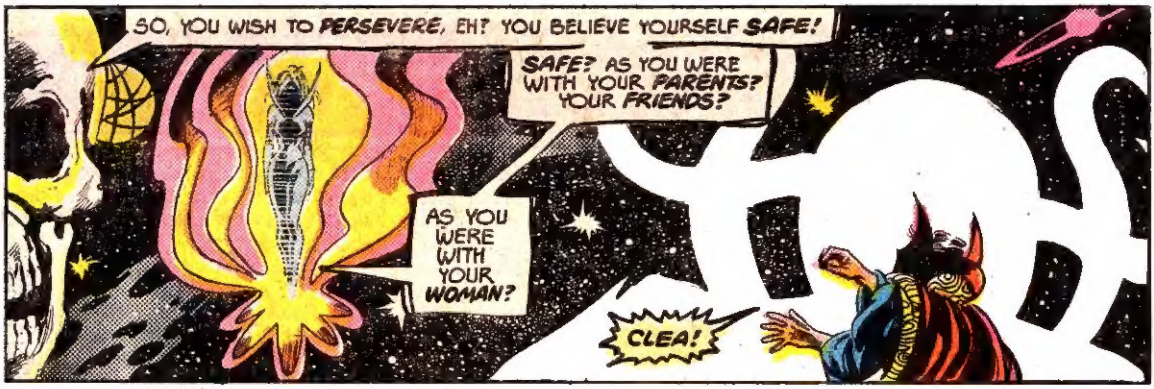
THEN, THE VOID!
IT... IS... SO...
NO! I AM! I AM WHAT I MUST CONCENTRATE UPON!
I DON'T DARE LET THE IMMEN...SITY OF MY SURROUNDINGS--
--MAKE ME FORGET WHAT I HAVE COME FOR! I FEEL AS IF I'M SLIPPING AWAY--
--SO I MUST FIGHT---
SHADES OF THE SHADOWY DEMONS! ARAGORN!


HE BECAME A SKELETON--JUST AFTER THAT METEORITE STRUCK HIS HOOF!
IT TOUCHED HIM--AND HE DIED!
THEN YOU MUST NOW REALIZE YOUR QUEST TO THE CENTER OF UNREALITY HAS BROUGHT YOU OUTSIDE, SPIRIT!
YOU FLICKER WITHIN THE DEPTHS OF DEATH AT LAST!
GOOD! THEN--
THEREFORE, THERE IS NOTHING FOR YOU BUT TO DIE!
"THE SLIGHTEST TOUCH OF MY REALM DISPELS LIFE WITHIN YOU! THE SIZEABLE ROCK WHICH SMOTE THE OTHER SPIRIT DISPATCHED IT ALMOST INSTANTLY, AS YOU SAW!
"EVEN NOW, THE SUBMICROSCOPIC PARTICLES ALWAYS PRESENT IN SPACE CUT THROUGH YOU--
"--BRINGING WEAKNESS--BRINGING BLOOD ONCE MORE FROM YOUR WOUND--
"--BRINGING DEATH!
NO! I MUST... LIVE! I HAVE... UNFINISHED WORK! CLEA--!
FOOLISH SPIRIT! HOW CAN YOU COMBAT DEATH?
DEATH IS EVERYWHERE!
"DEATH HOLDS SWAY OVER ALL THE UNIVERSE!"

YOU'RE WRONG! YOU HOLD NO SWAY OVER ME!
A SORCERER SUPREME CAN AVOID YOUR ATTACK, AS I DID THROUGH THE ORB OF AGAMOTTO..
--AND MORE-OVER...
--I CAN TURN THE ATTACK ON YOU IF FORCED! I WOULD RATHER SIMPLY DEPART---
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
VERY WELL, THEN!
IN THE NAME OF THE ETERNAL VISHANTI-- THROUGH THE HANDS OF OMNIPOTENT OSHTUR---
THIS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED, SPIRIT! DEATH REFUSES YOUR ENCHANTMENT, AS IT DID WHEN YOUR ORB TOOK YOU!
AAAAGH!
"DO YOU NOT YET COMPREHEND? YOU CANNOT CONTEND AGAINST UNIVERSAL LAW!
YOU HAVE LEFT THE REALM OF UN-REALITY, SPIRIT!
"IN THE REAL UNI-VERSE, EVERY-THING DIES!"

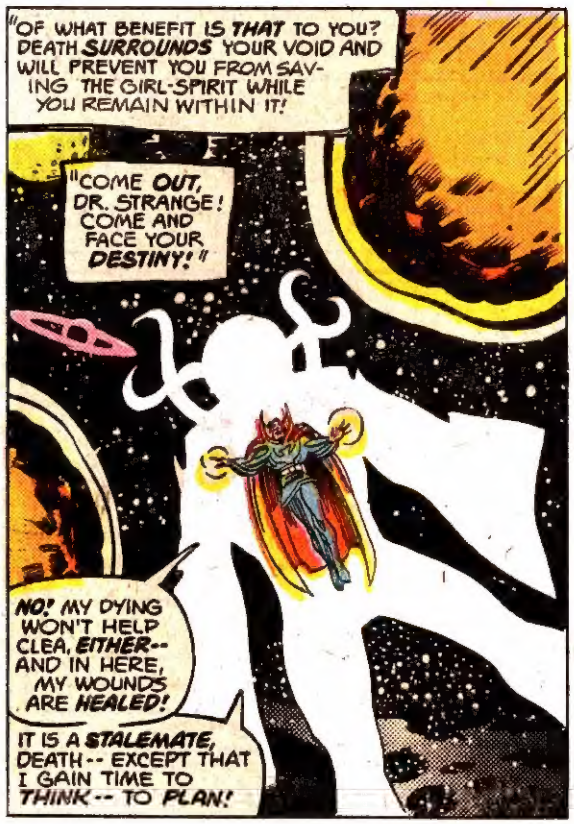
I'M -- IN THE REAL UNIVERSE? MY UNIVERSE?
"DID YOU NOT CHOOSE TO BE REAL?
"THEN YOU MUST DIE!"
I WON'T ACCEPT THAT! IF I CAN'T ATTACK YOU--
--I'LL ESCAPE YOU!
I ASK AGAIN: HOW?
"THERE IS NO WAY TO EMBRACE REALITY AND ESCAPE THE COSMOS!
"TIME MEANS NOTHING TO ME...
"...AND YOU MUST CONTINUALLY WEAKEN IN MY PRESENCE!
"ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, YOU WILL FEEL MY TOUCH!"
HEAD--SPINNING! I'M LOSING TOO MUCH BLOOD --AND FOR WHAT?
ALL MY MANEUVERING AMOUNTS TO STANDING STILL COMPARED TO THE SCOPE OF THE STARS--
WAIT!
WHAT'S THAT?
BY THE TWELVE MOONS OF MUNNOPOR! IT'S A HOLE IN SPACE --
--AND ITS SHAPE IS THAT OF-- ETERNITY!*
*REMEMBER--FROM SOME OF THE MYSTIC MASTER'S GREATEST TALES? -- ROY.

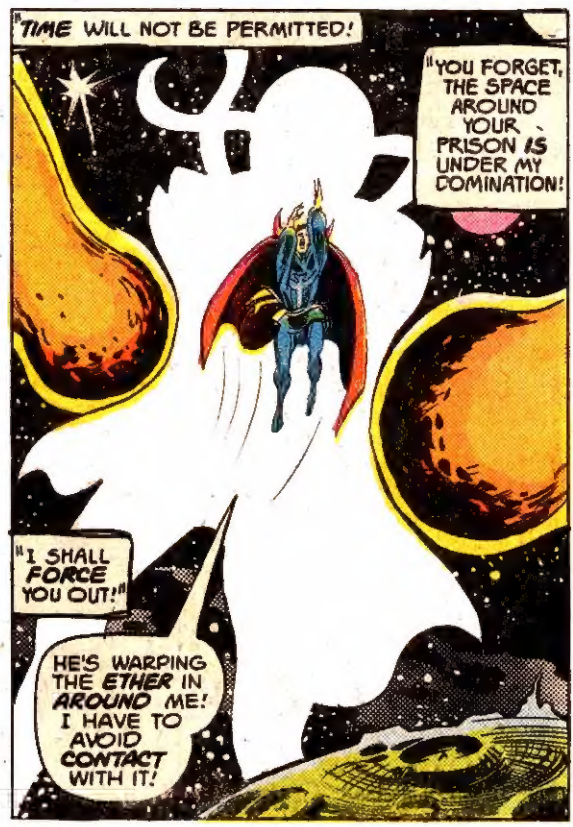
STOP! MAKE NO MOVE TOWARD THAT FORM!
YOU LIED TO ME-- AND I WAS FOOL ENOUGH TO BELIEVE YOU!
DEATH DOES NOT ENVELOP EVERYTHING!
YET THIS COMPREHENSION WILL BE OF NO AVAIL!
IN TRUTH, THE WHOLE OF CREATION IS THE SUM OF DEATH AND ETERNITY--
--BUT ETERNITY IS A MAN-SPAWNED CONCEPT! THUS HIS SHAPE-- AND HIS SIZE! HE IS ALL BUT INVISIBLE NEXT TO DEATH!
"YOU FOUND HIS PLACE--UNFILLED SINCE HIS VANISHMENT IN YEARS PAST! IT IS A VOID WITHIN THE VOID--
AGAIN YOU ARE WRONG, DEATH!
DR. STRANGE SHALL REACH THAT SANCTUARY--
YET I FOUND HIM!
"--BUT IT WILL NOT BE A HAVEN FOR YOU, SPIRIT! DEATH WILL NOT ALLOW IT!"
--IN SPITE OF ANYTHING YOU RAISE AGAINST HIM!

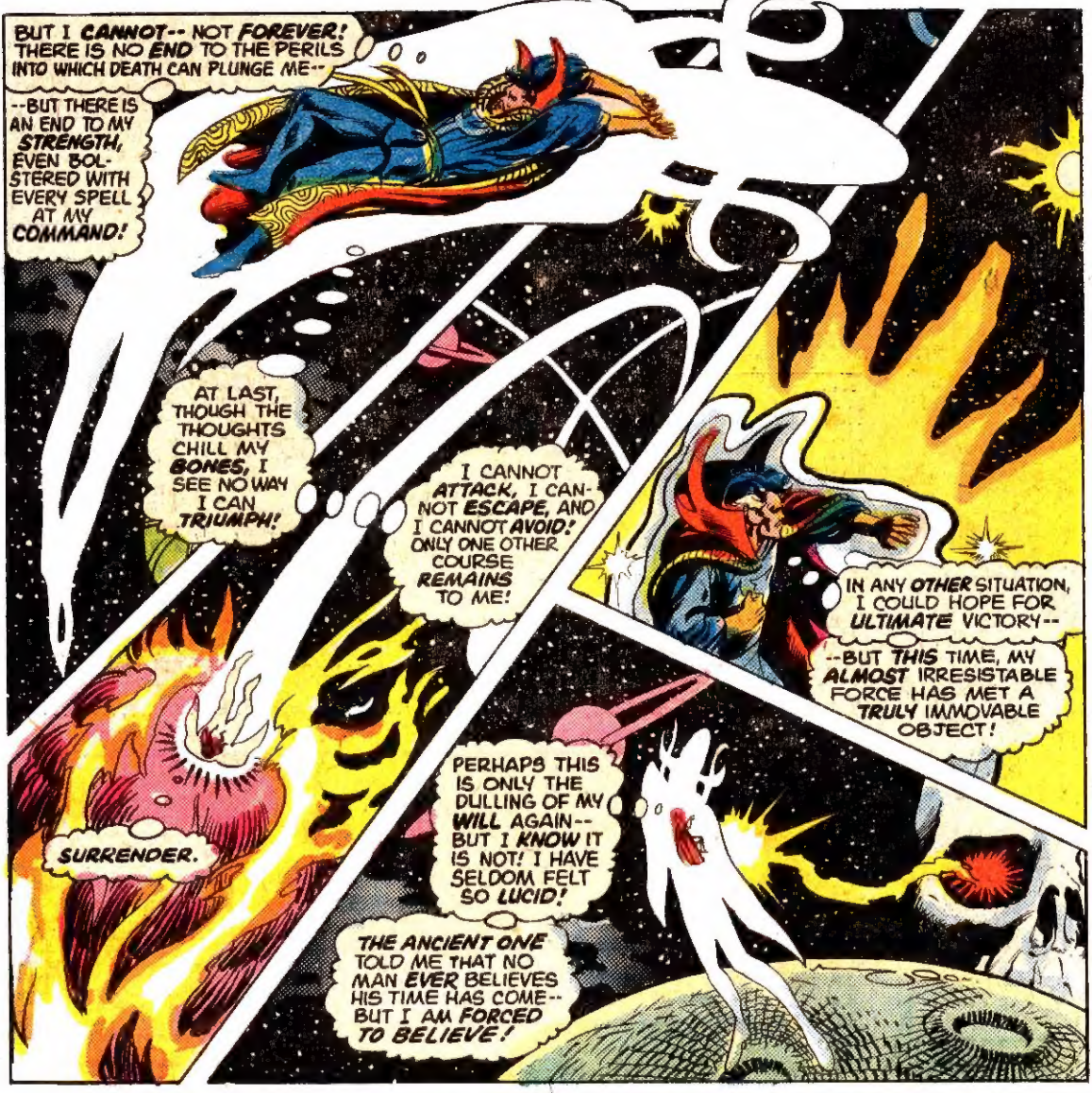

SO, YOU WISH TO PERSEVERE, EH? YOU BELIEVE YOURSELF SAFE!
SAFE? AS YOU WERE WITH YOUR PARENTS? YOUR FRIENDS?
AS YOU WERE WITH YOUR WOMAN?
CLEA!

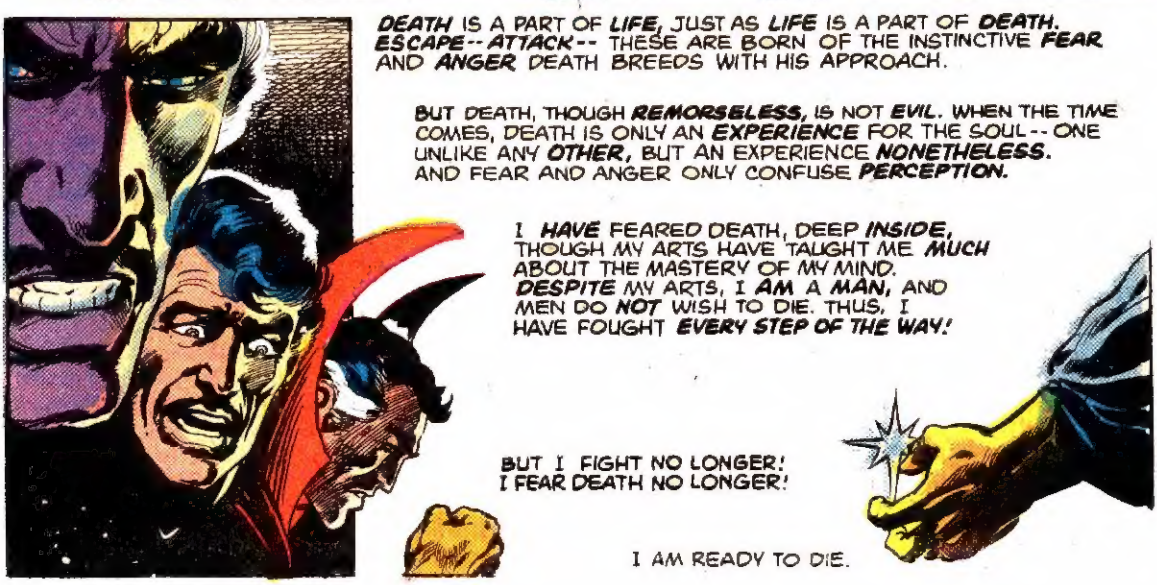
"SHE IS DYING, SPIRIT -- UNDER THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL TORTURES OF SILVER DAGGER! IF YOU DO NOT RETURN TO MY REALM --

"--SHE WILL COME TO ME! WILL YOU STAND ALOOF AND WATCH AS WE ON THIS SIDE CONDUCT OUR AFFAIRS?


"OF WHAT BENEFIT IS THAT TO YOU? DEATH SURROUNDS YOUR VOID AND WILL PREVENT YOU FROM SAVING THE GIRL-SPIRIT WHILE YOU REMAIN WITHIN IT!
"COME OUT, DR. STRANGE! COME AND FACE YOUR DESTINY!"
NO! MY DYING WON'T HELP CLEA, EITHER-- AND IN HERE, MY WOUNDS ARE HEALED!
IT IS A STALEMATE, DEATH -- EXCEPT THAT I GAIN TIME TO THINK -- TO PLAN!


"TIME WILL NOT BE PERMITTED!
"YOU FORGET, THE SPACE AROUND YOUR PRISON IS UNDER MY DOMINATION!
"I SHALL FORCE YOU OUT!"
HE'S WARPING THE ETHER IN AROUND ME! I HAVE TO AVOID CONTACT WITH IT!


BUT I CANNOT-- NOT FOREVER! THERE IS NO END TO THE PERILS INTO WHICH DEATH CAN PLUNGE ME--
--BUT THERE IS AN END TO MY STRENGTH, EVEN BOLSTERED WITH EVERY SPELL AT MY COMMAND!
AT LAST, THOUGH THE THOUGHTS CHILL MY BONES, I SEE NO WAY I CAN TRIUMPH!
I CANNOT ATTACK, I CANNOT ESCAPE, AND I CANNOT AVOID! ONLY ONE OTHER COURSE REMAINS TO ME!
IN ANY OTHER SITUATION, I COULD HOPE FOR ULTIMATE VICTORY--
--BUT THIS TIME, MY ALMOST IRRESISTABLE FORCE HAS MET A TRULY IMMOVABLE OBJECT!
SURRENDER.
PERHAPS THIS IS ONLY THE DULLING OF MY WILL AGAIN-- BUT I KNOW IT IS NOT! I HAVE SELDOM FELT SO LUCID!
THE ANCIENT ONE TOLD ME THAT NO MAN EVER BELIEVES HIS TIME HAS COME-- BUT I AM FORCED TO BELIEVE!


DEATH IS A PART OF LIFE, JUST AS LIFE IS A PART OF DEATH. ESCAPE--ATTACK-- THESE ARE BORN OF THE INSTINCTIVE FEAR AND ANGER DEATH BREEDS WITH HIS APPROACH.
BUT DEATH, THOUGH REMORSELESS, IS NOT EVIL. WHEN THE TIME COMES, DEATH IS ONLY AN EXPERIENCE FOR THE SOUL-- ONE UNLIKE ANY OTHER, BUT AN EXPERIENCE NONETHELESS. AND FEAR AND ANGER ONLY CONFUSE PERCEPTION.
I HAVE FEARED DEATH, DEEP INSIDE, THOUGH MY ARTS HAVE TAUGHT ME MUCH ABOUT THE MASTERY OF MY MIND. DESPITE MY ARTS, I AM A MAN, AND MEN DO NOT WISH TO DIE. THUS, I HAVE FOUGHT EVERY STEP OF THE WAY!
BUT I FIGHT NO LONGER! I FEAR DEATH NO LONGER!
I AM READY TO DIE.

WITH THAT, HE OPENS HIMSELF, AND GROWS, AND GROWS, TO FILL THE MAMMOTH FORM HE INHABITS--TO FEEL DEATH'S TOUCH ON ALL OF HIM AT ONCE --
--AND HE DIES.
BUT SUDDENLY, THE UNIVERSE AROUND HIS BODY BEGINS TO SHUDDER, LIKE THE FLANKS OF SOME RAGING BEAST--AND THEN, EVEN MORE QUICKLY, IT STARTS TO FALL AWAY FROM HIM--
--THE PLANETS RUSHING OUT TOWARD INFINITY, ROCKETING TOWARD A VANISHING SKULL --

--AND EVEN **MORE** SUDDENLY, HIS LIFELESS FORM IS--

--NOWHERE.

OR PERHAPS, THE MOST **WONDERFUL** SOMEWHERE OF ALL... FOR NOW, HIS EYES **REOPEN!**

AND THEY BEHOLD--

WELL DONE, STUDENT. YOU HAVE HAVE WON THE FIRST IN A **SERIES** OF TRIALS YOU MUST UNDERGO AS A SORCERER SUPREME--

--ALL **UN-KNOWINGLY,** OF COURSE.

THE ANCIENT ONE!

YOU HAVE EXPUNGED EVEN THE MOST **DEEPLY-HELD** FEAR OF DEATH WITHIN YOU.

MASTER! WHAT ARE YOU **SAYING?** AM I **NOT** DEAD?

ON **YOUR** PLANE OF EXISTENCE, **YES.** ON **THIS** ONE--MINE--IT MATTERS NOT.

YET YOU **SHALL** LIVE **AGAIN,** MY PUPIL--**REBORN** INTO YOUR REALM WITH **NO PHYSICAL FEARS** TO ARREST YOUR DEVELOPMENT. THIS IS THE YIELD OF YOUR **ACTIONS.**

YOU SHALL **LIVE**--AND YOUR LIFE SHALL BE TOUCHED WITH **ETERNITY,** FOR YOU WILL NEVER FEAR DEATH **AGAIN.**

FROM THIS MOMENT FORWARD, YOU WILL NOT **AGE.** DEATH MAY COME ONLY FROM **WITHOUT,** IN **BATTLE**--AND NOT FROM **WITHIN.**

YOU MAY LIVE FOR **600 YEARS,** AS I DID ONCE I WON THIS TRIAL... OR YOU MAY LIVE EVEN **LONGER... FOREVER!**

I DO FEEL... DIFFERENT.

ON YOUR FOREHEAD, THE **ANKH,** SYMBOL OF **ENDURING LIFE.**

BEFORE YOU, MANY **OTHER** UNEXPECTED TRIALS--TRIALS OF WHICH I MAY SAY **NO MORE**--

--YET IF YOU LIVE YOUR NEW LIFE **WELL,** YOU WILL **MEET** THEM WELL--AND IN THE END, YOU, **TOO,** SHALL BECOME--

--ONE WITH ALL.

HIS VOICE AND FACE FADE... AND SO DOES OUR STORY. REJOIN US IN **DR. STRANGE #5,** FOR THE GRAND FINALE!

SHOWDOWN WITH SILVER DAGGER!